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Eastern European Political Socialization Modeling Research: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper summarizes empirical modeling research on political socialization of the citizens in the new Eastern European democracies. The political socialization issue offers a comparative perspective over the modeling methodologies in analytical paradigms. Eastern European political culture research has revealed features of the electoral behavior and political participation which can be identified in different degrees in all the new democracies in the area: passivity with respect to political activity of parties, elites and institutions, political apathy or lack of reaction to anti-democratic actions, skepticism or distrust in institutions, scarce participation to social movements. Several authors explain the actual political behavior of the Eastern European citizens' and their low social and political involvement by the (political) culture heritage of the communist regimes in which they lived for a long time, and which keeps shaping their political attitudes towards the state, civil society, government and institutions. Research issues in the analysis of political participation are traditionally based on statistics analyses of empirical evidence coming from public surveys. However, scarcity of empirical data from the communist period with regard to (political) socialization, values and beliefs represent a major obstacle towards a better understanding of the historical roots of current behaviors and attitudes. Scarcity of observational data might be overcome by computational and simulation modeling.

Keywords: modeling, political socialization, political attitudes

1. Introduction

Much of the political culture research focused on the Eastern European post-communist regimes is concerned with the political attitudes of the individual citizens towards the politicians, state or government. Many observational studies search for the means to explain specific characteristics of the population in

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these countries: the distrust in government and in the political power, authority, and institutions, scarce interest and participation to the vote or in the actions of the civil society. Eastern European political culture research has revealed features of the electoral behavior and political participation of citizens which can be identified in different degrees in all new democracies: passivity with respect to political activity of parties, elites and institutions, political apathy or lack of reaction to anti-democratic actions, skepticism or distrust in institutions, scarce participation to social movements (Sztompka, 1998; Inglehart 1997, 1999, 2006; Mierina, 2011; Atanasov and Cvetanova, 2012; Srblijinović, 2012; Ferić and Lamza-Posavec, 2013; Petričušić, 2013).

Some authors explain the actual political behavior of the Eastern European citizens' and their low social and political involvement by the (political) culture heritage of the communist regimes in which they lived for a long time (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2012), and which keeps shaping their political attitudes towards the state, civil society, government and institutions (Rose, 1994, Sztompka 1996; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Karklins, 2005; Precupețu, 2008; Pehlivanova, 2009). Socialization theories and sociological research on social capital issues provide theoretical and empirical support to an Eastern European stereotype of low political efficacy at both individual and group levels, highlighting the dimensions of the influence this communist legacy still has on the dynamics of the relations between the individual citizen, the state and the society. Since the adult population in these Eastern European countries has been educated during the communist regimes, socialization theories explain the political behavior of the citizens by their political attitude formed during their early-life socialization. Though different from one periode of communist regime to another, the institutional education system in communist countries has been strongly dominated by ideology (Karklins, 2005; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2012, 2013) and imprinted a deep political skepticism and lack of social and political initiative (Karklins and Zepa, 2001; Mierina, 2011; Barbu, 20113).

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 briefly describes the modeling paradigms of political socialization. Section 3 describes the analytical modeling paradigms in political sociology research. Section 4 describes the modeling research methodology in political socialization. Section 5 briefly describes two analytical models of political socialization which explain the Eastern European political attitudes. The Section 6, Conclusions, explains the research interest in employing simulation modeling for political socialization issues in Eastern Europe.

2. Modeling Paradigms

Political culture models assume that attitude is dependent on values, beliefs, norms, knowledge and social perceptions that emerges from the interaction of individuals amongst them and from their interaction with democratic institutions. Political culture research has been mainly concerned with three major attitude change modeling paradigms. Classical Thick Models view attitudes as resistant to change (Geertz, 1973; Bourdieu, 1972; Eckstein, 1988; Inglehart, 1990; Putnam, 1993; Huntington, 1996). The Thin Models view attitude change as context-dependent and path-dependent (Almond, 1956; Almond and Verba, 1963; Laitin, 1988; Conover and Searing, 1994 ; Norrander and Jones, 1996). The Thick&Thin Models view political culture as a continuum and attitude change as dependent on both the interactions of the individuals amongst them, on the interactions between individuals and institutions, and on the interactions amongst (democratic) institutions themselves (Wildavsky, 1987; Mishler and Pollack, 2003).

Much of the literature on political socialization which has been published after 1989 has been elaborated by authors from Eastern European post-communist countries, who have studied the communist heritage in the area of political socialization (Csepeli, Kerl, and Stumpf (eds.), 1993; Csepeli, German, Kerl, and Stumpf (eds.), 1994; Šiber, 1991, 1994; Völgyes, 1975; Herspring and Völgyes, 1977; Barbu, 2013).

Many of these studies provide strong support to the idea that political socialization might be at the roots of the contemporary general distrust in institutions, passivity with respect to political action, and low participation in political processes (in particular, voting).

Making reference to North's idea that the mental constructs are the product of a mix of factors, from cultural heritage to both contextual and non-local learning, Srbljinović addresses the relationship between mental constructs (mentality) and the type of knowledge society, including political socialization as a moderating factor beside the institutional milieu:

"North does not elaborate the notion of mental constructs in detail, and only remarks that they result from actors' cultural heritage, local everyday problems the actors confront, and the actors' nonlocal learning (North, 1998, p. 17). If we assume that mental constructs roughly correspond to what we usually mean by "mentality", then some of its aspects, such as personality traits, for instance, are relatively fixed and not susceptible to much influence, while others, such as early socialization and lifelong social learning may be influenced, to some extent at least." (Srbljinovic, 2012; p.30)

Analyzing the communist regime, Barbu (2013) puts a special emphasis on the general lack of interest for the social and civic action and values in the Romanian communist regime:

"[...] totalitarian regimes are characterized by their "disbelief" in ideas, not by a widespread and internalized ideological creed [...] The pursuit of normalcy was perhaps the greatest moral misconduct under totalitarianism. The general disinterest for community life and the unconditional pursuit of personal interest help drawing the map of a geographical paradox: most Romanians lived in Romania without ever acknowledging to be present at, let alone part of the events that took place in their own country." (Barbu, 2013)

Discussing on the political identity construction mechanisms in multiethnic new Eastern European democracies, the case of Macedonia in particular, by analyzing the current public discourse and the governing narrative, Atanasov and Simoska (2013; pp.50-51) prove that the early life socialization in another regime (i.e. communist regime) could not completely (if at all) explain the construction of national identity image and the change of identity during the democratic periode. Besides political socialization, they also include the multiethnicity issue, whose improper management and combination with earlier authoritarian tradition, conveys the picture of a political regime which attracts rather citizens' disappointment and distrust:

"Compared to ten years ago there is less democratic culture, less participation than before; in one word – there is a process quite opposite to advancement going on in the Macedonian society. Furthermore, the social groups related to those characteristics have changed also. Ten years ago, such answers were typical for the older, less educated, middle class respondents. It was easy to explain it with their socialization in another political system. Today, such answers were given in a greater percentage by younger, more educated, urban citizens. The difference with respect to the ethnic background is evidently narrowing, on the account of some social characteristics, like social status and education" (Atanasov & Simoska, 2013; pp.50-51)

Analyzing the results of a wide survey on political participation in the Balkan new democracies, Petričušić (2013) synthesizes several common political attitudes toward elections, civil society and governance:

"With the exception of Albania, lack of interest is the most frequently mentioned reason for not participating [...]. It is striking that 40% of respondent in Croatia, with similar percentages in Serbia and BiH entity Republika Srpska, declared their lack of interest in communal life. This is a worrying indicator of the absence of civic values and

indicates a prevailing individualism. In average, 20% of respondents in all surveyed countries think the time constraints keep them away from participation in issues of communal interest. Significant percentage, ranging from 14-25%, consists of people who opted for civic apathy because they did not believe they were able to influence the process and contribute to the societal change. Even one quarter of respondents in Albania and one fifth of them in BiH entity Federation of BiH considered that there was no need to act and seek reforms. These findings are especially surprising when the quality of life in those countries is taken into account. The same is thought by one tenth respondents in Serbia, Republika Srpska and Croatia, and approximately 14-16% of those surveyed in Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo. From 8% to 15% of respondents in the region does not even know what they might do in order to address problems in local community or society in general.” (Petričušić, 2013; pp.42-43)

Her survey analysis succeeds to provide an overall picture of the Balkan perceptions of political power, institutions, rights and rules of a democratic establishment. The detail of the analysis allows the author to further extends it to drawing several conclusions on the concept of “*international socialization*” which has been introduced in the Eastern European new democracies in association with and a “*strategy of external socialization*” by the European and international organizations (EU, NATO, OSCE). The requirements included in this strategy with respect to the socialization of the citizens, primarily of the elites in these countries, revealed that the communist political socialization heritage as well as the scarce democratic instruction and experience of these countries make the strategy inefficient since it “*externally induced norm of compliance that requires acceptance of preferred behaviours, eventually resulting in the internalization of new values and norms*” (*Ibid.*, p.35), without taking into consideration the characteristics of the Balkan geopolitical and historical area. The idea is accepted by large segments of populace in Croatia and in several other countries, like Serbia, who has opposed for long time to the europeanization project. It is also approached in various versions in large public surveys on political participation in post-communist countries by young Czech (Vráblíková, 2008) or Macedonian authors (Markovik, 2010).

Early political socialization theories have been primarily developed within U.S.A. social-psychology communities of research. Dismissed with time for their inability to admit and model the contextual influence and the dynamical change of early-life socialization-induced behavioral orientations during the adult life, these theories have been revisited by the late 1970s. Considerably changed from this point of view (Niemi and Hepburn, 1995), late theories of political socialization have shifted the emphasis onto the changes in attitudes and beliefs from the early life to those of adult life, which prove that neither the primacy, nor the structuring principle does hold always. By the mid’1980s, educational programs in U.S.A. approached political socialization in schools at different degrees and this extensive change was associated with new research on the dynamical character of early life socializing issues during the adult life.

However, these theories, initially developed by American scholars, proved different for countries outside U.S.A. One such example is provided by the political socialization in Eastern European new democracies which have emerged after 1989, and which have ever since experienced difficulties in transmitting democratic values from the old to the young generation:

“... in new and reestablished democracies there is a concern over the political awareness and the values of the next generation [...] In newer democracies, “automatic” transmission of democratic values from one generation to the next cannot be taken for granted, and it cannot be readily assumed that educational institutions or families will teach the appropriate knowledge and values. Older generations, from whom transmission might be expected, are themselves often untutored or inexperienced in democratic processes [...]” (Niemi and Hepburn, 1995; p. 9)

Since the quality of a democracy is dependent on the quality of the social and political participation of the citizens, political attitudes and behavior research is meant to answer societal needs of identifying the

causes which generate them and the political mechanisms which provide support for changing political attitudes towards an increasing quality of the democratic political involvement.

All this justifies the high interest in political socialization modeling research. However, it brings at the same time difficulties in approaching this issue due to scarce empirical data and documents of the past. Facing such an information gap, models could fail to explain a reality which is incompletely (if at all!) specified by existing documents or other proofs. Besides a huge effort to retrieve the historical traces of the communism era in the day-to-day life of the citizens, modeling could provide itself a solution: the generative modeling techniques might generate data which can be further evaluated in simulation scenarios. It is in this respect that computational and simulation modeling techniques can prove their value and utility in political analysis and methodology areas.

3. Political socialization modeling in Eastern European political methodology research

These modeling paradigms uncover a whole range of approaches on political socialization, addressing both conceptual and empirical modeling as well as computational and simulation modeling, though these two orientations are not balanced as yet, qualitative approaches based on survey analysis techniques and empirical data being the prevailing approach.

Research issues seem dominated by those addressing political behavior (vote behavior, electoral campaigns, electoral candidates, political participation) and political attitudes towards institutions, authority and political power. Empirical studies are targetting political culture explanative models, able to identify and prove the roots of the measured political behavioral and attitudinal tendencies in the present days. Scarcity of data about the Eastern European communism times is challenged by observational studies currently developed on multiple dimensions (public opinion and attitude surveys, public memory and culture patrimony, studies of recent history concerning the (secret) document archives left behind by the communist regimes). Analytical techniques include a wide variety of traditional statistics-mathematical techniques from multifactorial analysis, initially introduced by Thurstone and Spearman in the late 1920s, to advanced estimators techniques (Achen, 2002). Notwithstanding their extensive employment and considerable analytical power, model-invariant theories based on survey analysis techniques cannot cope with the absence of fundamental empirical data from the past. It is this point in particular where computational and simulation modeling techniques prove their value.

In parallel with traditional and advanced political analysis techniques, which are based on empirical evidence coming from public surveys, political attitude research has been seriously penetrated by Social Simulation techniques. As a newly emerged area of research which intensively uses simulation-based modeling methodology, Computational Political methodology has succeeded to defeat the traditional skepticism of the social science community to virtual experiments of modeling and simulation. As a new political methodology branch, it proves an increase in the relevance degree of political methodology approaches which make an intensive use of generative modeling and simulation techniques (Voinea, 2013c).

One of the problems in the analytical models is the identification of the dependent and independent variables. Also, much of the contextual factors are difficult to be identified in the empirical data provided by public surveys. It is not only a matter of questionnaire design. It is first and foremost a matter of paradigm.

The empirical paradigm is strong in identifying regularities and patterns in the data, provided that the data collection is large enough and the questionnaires have the means to detect the information of interest in the individual responses. If it satisfies these conditions, the results of the empirical research are believable. However, beyond the "believable", the empirical picture is just a static photography from which one

could hardly deduce the dynamics of the real phenomena, since beyond actual social interaction between individuals, no other method is known in generating the social data.

The computational and, especially, the simulation paradigm is stronger in generating data which can be further analyzed, provided that the simulation scenario design is sufficiently close to the real situations. The advantage here is that the social situation can be described and achieved with sufficient accuracy so as to allow the generation of believable data. The major drawback is the interpretation of data obtained from simulations, the explanative (causal) models being dependent on the semantics of the results. However, when lacking empirical data, generative experiments seem the most convenient solution. As convenient as the level of interdisciplinarity of research teams allow for the design of the simulation experiments.

4. Political Socialization Theories

Political socialization theories are concerned with specific processes of socialization in which children acquire political norms and behavioral orientations towards political issues, but which should be approached on a different basis than general knowledge and skills acquisition or social learning (Hyman, 1957).

Early theories on political socialization (Hyman, 1957; Greenstein, 1965; Easton and Dennis, 1969) focus on child capacity to learn symbols, norms and behavioral tendencies which are strongly connected to political issues, like party, nation or leader (Hyman, 1957). These theories put a strong emphasis on the primacy principle, which holds that “*early political learning is relatively enduring*” over the adult’s life time (Sears, Schwartz and Lind, 1973, p.416) and on the *structuring* principle, which “*holds that orientations acquired during childhood structure the later learning of specific issue beliefs*” (*Ibidem*).

Both early and late socialization theories, but in different extent, (Cambell et al., 1960; Greenstein, 1965; Langton and Jennings, 1968; Jennings and Markus, 1984) are based on the idea that many of the citizens’ political attitudes are acquired and dependent on the time and type of political regime in which they come of age.

Revitalization of political socialization theories after the mid’1980s has been mainly possible due to a number of theoretical and experimental considerations on the nature of the socializing phenomena. Beside those concerning the design of questionnaires and public surveys, the age and other personal features of the analyzed cohorts and the idea of interviewing separately and specifically the different types of respondents (children, family, teachers), one major consideration was that of identifying a better operationalization of the political socialization inter-, and intra-generational variability, of the contextual factors and of outcomes for long-term phenomena. As matter of fact, this still represents a goal which must be fulfilled if notable results are expected.

5. Political Socialization: Two Analytical Models

A very interesting class of analytical models has been developed by Grigore Pop-Eleches and Joshua Tucker (2012-2013) on the political attitude of citizens in post-communist regimes.

One type of models are concerned with the mechanism through which communist legacies affect post-communist political attitudes and addresses citizen’s personal experience (internalized values) in the communist regime. Since the communism regimes varied from one another both as periode of exercise and as ideological and governance characteristics, the political socialization and the coming of age of the citizens are influenced by this variability.

5.1 CRES Model (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2012)

The analytical model takes as dependent variables the support for democracy and democratic values, and the support for capitalism and market economy. As independent variables the model takes different types of exposure to communism. To measure the exposure, the model takes into consideration not the length of exposure (cumulative experience), but rather the periode/type of communist regime when the citizen came to age politically (socialization experience).



Figure 1.

The model of personal exposure to communism and its effects on post-communist political attitudes
(Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2012-2013)

The data has been extracted from a public survey ("Post-Communist Publics" Study) which has been administered in two waves, first on 12 ex-communist countries (1990-1992), and then to 14 ex-communist countries and West Germany (1998-2001). The results have been evaluated with a regression analysis. The conclusions are drawn for two versions of communist regime (monolithic and segmented) and two types of effects (imprinting and resistance). Combinations of various temporal segments of communism with various types of exposure provide for scenarios of imprinting (low support for democracy and market) and resistance (high support for democracy and market).

Another type of models are concerned with the same mechanism, but addressing this time the contextual conditions (economic, political, sociodemographic) in which communist legacy influences the post-communist political attitudes and political participation. In the CRES Model (Communist Regime Exposure Socialization Model) (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2013 a), they model the roots of different democratic political attitudes in the citizens of post-communist regimes. Modeling is based on two main ideas. The first is context, which is defined by external factors describing sociodemographic and economic

conditions, cultural and political institutions in different Eastern European communist regimes. The second is the individual exposure and the personal experience during the various periods of communism.

CRES model represents an advanced version of the previous explanative model: it takes into consideration economic, political and cultural factors. The diversity of context descriptions is in turn determined by the different periods and types of communist establishments in various Eastern European countries. Other indicators are involved as intensifiers of exposure, for example, types of communism (country level), communist education, residence, and gender at the individual level) or as resistance to exposure (communist education, residence and gender for country level; age, religion, pre-communist education at the individual level).

Communist Regime Exposure Socialization Model (CRES)

(Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2013)

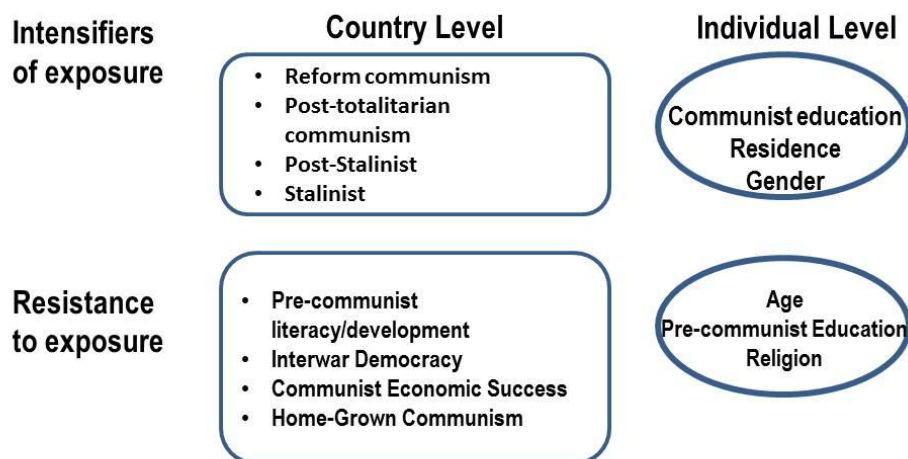


Figure 2.

CRES Model (Pop-Eleches, 2013).
(Adapted from Pop-Eleches, 2013; Table 2.2)

The detailed list of factors at both country and individual level provides the model with a higher discriminatory power: CRES Model succeeds to discriminate among citizens in different post-communist countries from the point of view of the “democratic deficit” which characterizes their support for democracy and democratic values. The model proves that reform communism and the post-communism contexts (type of communism) are determinant for the post-democratic attitudes toward democracy, while exposure to harder types of communism (stalinist and post-totalitarianism) determine the lower levels of support to democracy. The modeling approach is based on public survey data in Eastern European countries.

The model variables however do not involve in a psychological approach, but rather an economical one. It is a causal model connecting variables describing individual context with variables describing country context.

5.2 Top-down Model of Political Socialization (Mierina, 2011)

The second model has been developed by Mierina (2011) using a top-down psychological approach of the institutional mechanisms which could facilitate (or not) the political participation of the individual citizens. This top-down model is based on a different modeling paradigm and a different methodological approach.

The modeling paradigm is provided by the institution-centred social capital theories. It connects the institutional influence to the individual behavior, mainly to the individual trust in political institutions and individual political participation.

The social capital theories might have different recommendations for different types of democracies, since the degree of democratic maturity is different in old democracies and in new democracies, like the Eastern European ones. On this basis, the author models the political socialization and the citizens' perceptions and behavioral orientations so as to explain the formation and change of political attitudes, political participation and trust in political authority in the Eastern European post-communist countries. The author starts from the hypothesis that the communist legacy has a major impact on the post-communist political attitudes and participation of the citizens to political action. If distrust in institutions and political apathy are "reinforced" by the lack of responsiveness of institutions and the perception of corruption, then citizens' support for democracy decreases more and more. Contrasted with the "*virtuous circle*" of negative political socialization" (Mierina, 2011; p. 19-23) characteristic to mature highly industrialized democracies in which good governance stimulate citizens' political involvement, this type of "*vicious circle*" (*Ibidem*) seems more appropriate to describe the mechanism alienation from politics in the new Eastern European democracies. Not only early-life political socialization and coming of age in another regime (communist legacy), but the poor performance of the political establishment may make the "*vicious circle*" hard to break, inducing what the psychologists call the "*cognitive mechanism of 'learned helplessness*" (*Ibid.*).

The model identifies several variables to model the context in which citizens in post-communist regimes gradually loose support for democracy and trust in political authority as the political institutions worsen their performances. The model uses structural equation model (multivariate regression model) to evaluate the latent variables and the influences between them.

The Top-down Political Socialization Model identifies three mechanisms which describe the institutional influence on the individual behavior and political attitude: (a) by generating perceptions of political efficacy, (b) by generating perceptions of citizen's personal political competence, and (c) by generating interpersonal trust.

The structural equation model is based on several variables which describe the general trust in institutions, the performances of political institutions and their (perceived) responsiveness, the (perceived) corruption, the citizens, the political competence and the interpersonal trust (the original model includes more variables). The connections and influences between these variables describe a potential "*vicious circle*" (for high perceptions on corruption, low political performances and lack of responsiveness).

Top-down Model of Political Socialization

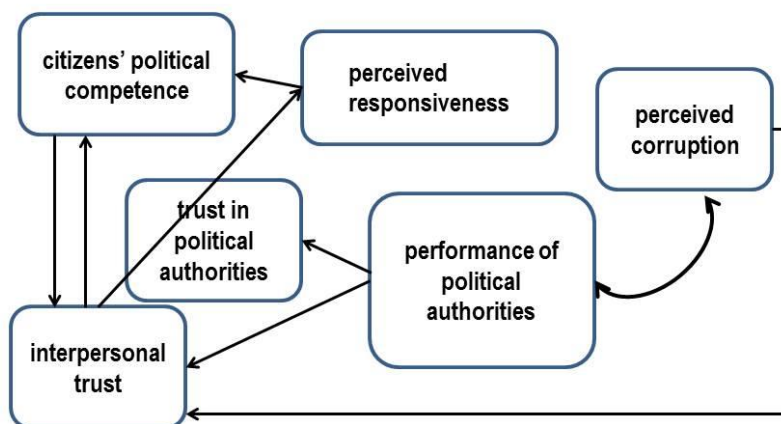


Figure 3.
Top-down Political Socialization Model.
(adapted from Mierina , 2011; pp. 163-165)

The model is interesting because it provides a top-down approach to a political culture subject matter, namely political socialization, by emphasizing the mechanisms which make political institutions shape the behaviors and attitudes of individual citizens in a post-communist democracy.

The model intensively uses estimative methods for evaluating latent variables. The constructs make the model highly speculative, but nonetheless efficient and believable.

Like the CRES Model, the Top-Down Model of Political Socialization does not provide support to the idea that communist legacy negatively impacts the political participation and trust in institutions of the citizens in Eastern European post-communist countries.

6. Conclusions

Political socialization studies concerned with Eastern European new democracies are interesting for the perspective they might offer for employing computational political research methodology. As a considerable part of such studies on Eastern European recent history might face the problem of recovering massive data from the communist era, they are a potential candidate for generative modeling research.

So far, research in this area has been mainly supported with empirical data and analytical tools. We have developed this short study in order to compare the results reported in these research with those which could be obtained with computational and simulation modeling techniques. Ongoing research encourage us to approach Eastern European political socialization with complexity theory and agent-based modeling techniques. They will make the subject of the forthcoming research paper on this issue.

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